



YOUTH AND LGBTQ+ PARTICIPATION IN NONVIOLENT ACTION

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ABSTRACT

Nonviolent action campaigns are more frequent now than ever before, but little is known about how their demographic composition shapes their efficacy, in either the short or long term. This report introduces the Women in Resistance + (WiRe+) dataset, which includes novel measures of youth and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer + (LGBTQ+) participation in maximalist nonviolent campaigns from 1990-2020. The data reveals that movements with extensive youth participation tend to succeed, and that youth participation is associated with improvements to democratic quality in the post-campaign period. However, youth participation is associated with increased repression, even though movements with high youth participation are not more likely to resort to violence. LGBTQ+ participation is strongly associated with youth frontline participation and the presence of youth organizations in social movements. And worryingly, beyond broad improvements to democracy, neither youth nor LGBTQ+ participation is associated with improvements to material wellbeing for those groups in post-campaign periods. Thus, while youth and LGBTQ+ participation in social movements may have inclusive democratizing effects, movements and their supporters must do more to empower these actors with the tools, skills, and enabling environment needed for their own political advocacy.

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Cover Photo: Activists and youth from Fridays for Future Mexico take action in front of the national palace to demand climate action now as part of the global climate strike day of action. Sept. 25, 2020. Photo credit to Alejandro Garcia, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/350org/50751467342>

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ACRONYMS

LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer +
NVA	Nonviolent Action
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USIP	U.S. Institute of Peace
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy Data Set
WiRe+	Women in Resistance + Data Set

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nonviolent action (NVA) campaigns are more frequent now than ever before, yet we know comparatively little about how the demographic composition of nonviolent movements shapes their efficacy, in either the short or long term. Recent studies have examined how participation by key demographic groups—such as ethnic or racial minorities, women, and students—influence nonviolent campaign outcomes. But the effects of both youth and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer + (LGBTQ+) participation on NVA dynamics outcomes remain understudied. As both youth and openly LGBTQ+ populations are continuing to grow globally, it is important to better understand how their participation might be influencing evolving patterns of civil resistance in the 21st century.

To that end, this report introduces the Women in Resistance + (WiRe+) dataset. This cross-national data collection effort extends the existing WiRe dataset, which documented women's participation in civil resistance campaigns, with novel variables capturing global youth and LGBTQ+ participation in maximalist nonviolent campaigns from 1990-2020. Maximalist campaigns are those that seek to overturn the existing government, secede, or establish a newly independent state. In turn, this report provides a correlational analysis of this data that assesses both the causes and effects of youth and LGBTQ+ participation.

Several major findings emerge from the analysis:

- Youth frontline participation is associated with both an increased likelihood of campaign success and improvements to democracy in the post-campaign period. This latter relationship appears to hold even for campaigns that failed to achieve their initial, maximalist objectives.
- Youth movements are no more prone to violent flank formation than movements lacking extensive youth frontline participation, yet they still appear to face more violent repression. This is especially the case when campaigns fail to achieve regime change.
- Overt LGBTQ+ participation in NVA campaigns has been relatively rare until recent years. While findings are therefore preliminary, LGBTQ+ participation is strongly associated with youth frontline participation and the presence of youth organizations in social movements.
- Although youth participation is associated with broad improvements to democracy (which may in turn bring about positive social change), neither youth nor LGBTQ+ participation is directly associated with improvements to material wellbeing for those groups in post-campaign periods, even if those movements succeed.

These findings suggest that engaging young people can help NVA campaigns bring about positive change, even if they ultimately fall short of their maximalist goals. Policymakers and organizing leaders that seek inclusive democratizing impacts should therefore welcome youth and LGBTQ+ participation in protest movements, while remaining cognizant about the real risks of repression. At the same time, movements and their supporters should be more intentional about empowering youth and LGBTQ+ participants with the tools, skills, and enabling environment that these groups need, not just for their immediate participation in NVA campaigns, but also for sustained political advocacy in the years that follow.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past century, the number of nonviolent campaigns pursuing national level political transformation—from self-determination to regime change—has increased dramatically. In traditional discussions of world history, violent revolutions are portrayed as the paradigmatic example of conflict between citizen and state. Yet since 1900 the overwhelming majority of revolutionary (or “maximalist”) campaigns have been primarily nonviolent, a trend that has only grown more pronounced in recent years.¹

Unfortunately, there remains a wide disparity between the frequency with which nonviolent campaigns achieve political change and what is known about them. It is only in the past two decades that social scientists have systematically documented different kinds of mass nonviolent campaigns and their rates of success. This burgeoning field of research has found that, on average, nonviolent mass movements are more likely to succeed than violent movements, and that their success produces more democratic outcomes.²

Recently, scholars have begun to consider how the demographic composition of nonviolent campaigns influences their chances of success. This work has explored how participation by ethnic or racial minority groups, women, and students shapes nonviolent campaign outcomes.³ Activists and observers have also recognized that who mobilizes and who stays home is an important determinant of movement success and long-term impact.

Building on these strides, this report investigates how the participation of two demographic subgroups—youth⁴ and LGBTQ+⁵ people—affects nonviolent campaign outcomes. Both groups have played central roles in recent high-profile nonviolent movements. For instance, the 2018 anti-Ortega protests in Nicaragua featured highly visible LGBTQ+ participation despite targeted repression; Nigeria’s 2020 End SARS protests were driven by Nigerian youth, one of the largest country youth cohorts in the world; and the 2022 Iranian uprising (ongoing as of this writing) is anchored by courageous young women mobilizing in schools and universities to protest oppressive gender discrimination.

Nevertheless, the impacts of both youth and LGBTQ+ participation on nonviolent campaign dynamics are understudied. Past research has considered factors that cause youth to protest, such as

¹ Chenoweth, Erica. “The Future of Nonviolent Resistance.” *The Journal of Democracy* 31(3): 69-84.

² Chenoweth, Erica, and Maria J. Stephan. 2011. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. Columbia University Press; Jonathan Pinckney. 2020. *From Dissent to Democracy: The Promise and Perils of Civil Resistance Transitions*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press; Bethke, Felix S. and Jonathan Pinckney. 2021. “Nonviolent Resistance and the Quality of Democracy.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 38(5): 503-523.

³ Manekin, Deborah, and Tamar Mitts. 2022. “Effective for Whom? Ethnic Identity and Nonviolent Resistance.” *American Political Science Review* 116(1): 161–80. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000940>; Pinckney, Jonathan C., and Miranda Rivers. 2021. “Precarity and Power: Reflections on Women and Youth in Nonviolent Action.” *Peaceworks No. 178*, United States Institute of Peace; Dahlum, Sirianne. 2019. “Students in the Streets: Education and Nonviolent Protest.” *Comparative Political Studies* 52(2): 277–309. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018758761>; Chenoweth, Erica. 2019. “Women’s Participation and the Fate of Nonviolent Campaigns: A Report on the Women in Resistance (WiRe) Data Set.” *One Earth Future Foundation*.

⁴ Following USAID’s standard terminology, this report defines “youth” as those aged 10-29.

⁵ This report uses the term LGBTQ+ throughout. Some have argued that other terms, such as Gender and Sexual Minorities (GSM) and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI), are more technically accurate and inclusive, and also less politicized. We acknowledge these arguments but use LGBTQ+ to reflect the types of groups measured in the WiRe+ campaign dataset—many groups that participate in protests explicitly identify as LGBTQ+, and their activities are usually politicized as such—as well as the data collection and coding instructions initially provided to research assistants.

youth bulges and unemployment,⁶ but has much less to say about its effects. Similarly, the prevalence and implications of LGBTQ+ participation in nonviolent campaigns is an almost entirely unexplored empirical topic. These groups face distinct challenges even as they overlap. Yet as both youth and openly LGBTQ+ populations are continuing to grow globally, it is important to better understand the implications of their participation for the dynamics of nonviolent campaigns.

To that end, the report introduces novel cross-national data on youth and LGBTQ+ participation in nonviolent action campaigns from 1990 to 2020. During this time, nonviolent movements far surpassed violent campaigns in size and frequency, and nonviolent campaigns achieved some of their highest global success rates, while also experiencing increasingly sophisticated government repression.⁷

Although this report is unable to determine causal effects due to the structure of the data, the descriptive patterns that appear from the analysis are both encouraging and concerning. Most importantly, youth frontline participation is associated with both initial campaign success and improved democratic quality in the years after the campaign has ended. These correlations persist when controlling for campaign size, population size, youth population percentage, and campaign end year. Improvements to democratic quality appear to occur following increased youth participation regardless of whether the campaign succeeds. Although they are correlational only, these associations align with existing work emphasizing the importance of building diverse coalitions and the positive role that youth have played in many nonviolent campaigns.⁸

That said, youth frontline participation is also associated with repression. Even though there is no association between youth participation and violent flank formation, regimes appear especially likely to respond to youth-full movements with violence. Moreover, neither youth nor LGBTQ+ participation is associated with long-term material gains for those groups, such as improvements to youth unemployment or LGBTQ rights. In other words, youth and LGBTQ+ participation may enhance democratic quality without rectifying the underlying societal inequities that may have initially motivated their participation—they may be a democratic tide that lifts all boats but their own. This finding reinforces those from other studies illustrating that women and youth often struggle to translate movement participation into durable structural change in male-dominated and older political arenas.⁹

THE WIRE+ DATASET

This project extends the WiRe Dataset, which identifies women's frontline participation in roles in maximalist campaigns from 1945-2014, by adding comparable indicators for youth and LGBTQ+

⁶ For instance, see Alcinda Honwana. 2013. "Youth, Waithood, and Political Protest in Africa." Lugard Lecture, International African Institute; Henrik Urdal. 2006. "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence." *International Studies Quarterly* 50: 607-629.

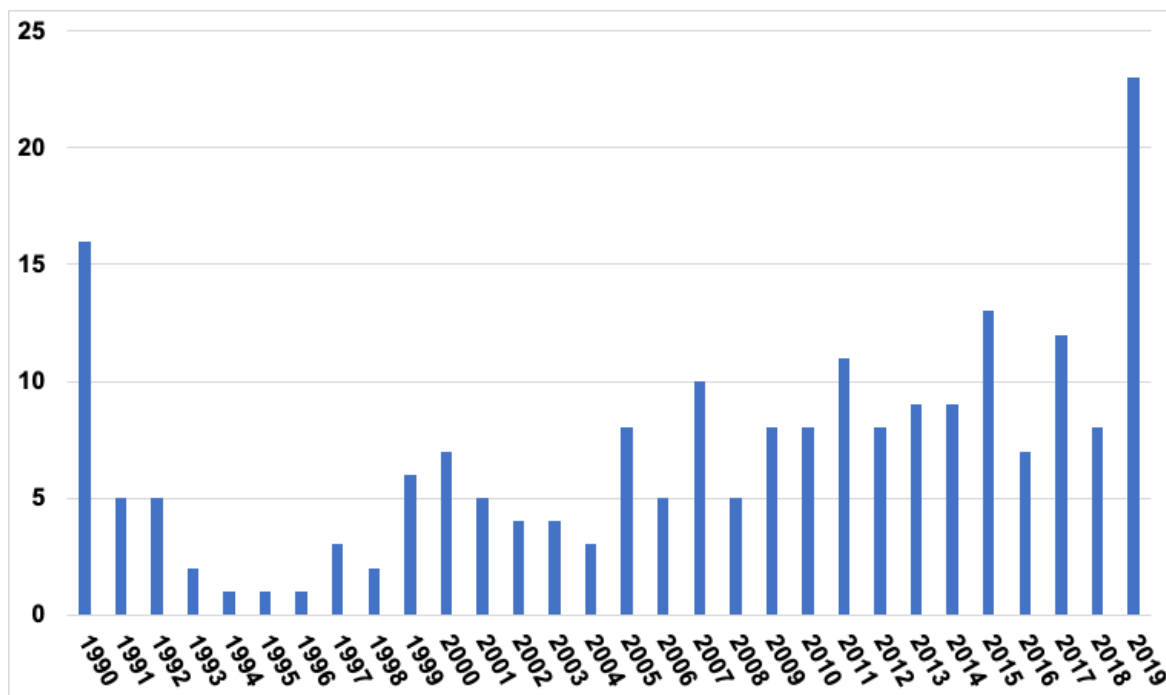
⁷ Chenoweth (2020), "The Future of Nonviolent Resistance."

⁸ Earl, Jennifer, Thomas V. Maher, and Thomas Elliott. 2017. "Youth, Activism, and Social Movements." *Sociology Compass* 11(4). Nepstad, Sharon Erickson. 2015. *Nonviolent Struggle: Theory, Strategies, and Dynamics*. Oxford University Press; Pinckney and Rivers (2021), "Precarity and Power."

⁹ Pinckney and Rivers (2021), "Precarity and Power"; Marie A. Principe. 2017. "Women in Nonviolent Movements." *Special Report No. 399, US Institute of Peace*; Georgina Waylen. 1994. "Women and Democratization: Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics." *World Politics* 46: 327-54.

participation.¹⁰ Observational data were collected from all maximalist campaigns in the world, from 1990 to 2020 (Figure 1). Maximalist campaigns are defined following the NAVCO data coding conventions,¹¹ which includes all mass movements aimed at overthrowing the central government of a country, seceding, or establishing a newly independent state. During the WiRe+ study period of 1990-2020, 209 campaigns met these criteria, of which 192 pursued the overthrow of the government and 16 campaigns sought secession or self-determination.

Figure 1. Onsets of Maximalist Nonviolent Campaigns, 1990-2019 (n=209)



In total, 115 (52.6%) were unsuccessful and 94 (45%) successful, with self-determination and secessionist campaigns significantly less likely to succeed. Success is defined narrowly as the maximal objective, excluding potential concessions, reforms, and other partial successes. It also does not account for backsliding or counter-revolutionary developments that transpired in the wake of initial “success.”

A team of trained and supervised research assistants at Harvard coded each historical case according to a set of binary and ordinal indicators that capture the presence of youth and LGBTQ+ participants on the frontlines and as movement leaders; the extent of youth participation and leadership; the presence of youth and LGBTQ+ organizations in the movements; and the prominence of youth issues in the campaigns. The product of these efforts is the WiRe+ Dataset. A codebook detailing the variables and their definitions is available in the appendix, and the data and codebook are also available on Harvard Dataverse.¹²

¹⁰ Erica Chenoweth. 2019. “Women In Resistance Dataset, Version 1.” <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/BYFJ3Z>, Harvard Dataverse, V3.

¹¹ Chenoweth, Erica and Christopher Wiley Shay. 2019. “NAVCO 2.1 Dataset.” <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/MHOXDV>, Harvard Dataverse, V2.

¹² The WiRe+ dataset and codebook are available at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/GIMI9U>

Note that the WiRe+ data's scope condition of "maximalist" campaigns is a modest but meaningful limitation. This study includes major episodes of civil resistance that aim for fundamental changes in political order. Collecting global data on non-maximalist campaigns, such as reformist movements or single-issue campaigns with less expansive objectives, would be prohibitively time consuming, and the basic logic of nonviolent action should be similar in both contexts. Still, non-maximalist campaigns may exhibit different dynamics than the campaigns included in the WiRe+ dataset. Youth and LGBTQ+ groups could be more or less effective at advocating for non-maximalist demands, and repression could be less severe, but the WiRe+ data does not enable tests of this nature. Future work on youth and LGBTQ+ mobilization could investigate these relationships, perhaps by focusing on mobilization around specific issues such as education reform or climate policies.

YOUTH AND NONVIOLENT ACTION

Youth represent an important political demographic across the globe. Young people between the ages of 10-29 account for more than 2.4 billion people, more than 30% of the global population. Yet youth wield widely divergent levels of political power, varying by country and region. In countries with a meaningful electoral process, the minimum voting age varies from 16 to 21 years; however, most countries have significantly older political elites. Regional variations are also significant, with 40% of the African population younger than 15 (15 percentage points more than the world average), compared to Europe, where just 16% of the population is below 15 years and 18% is over 65.

Regardless of youth population size, young people have been at the frontlines of protest movements in recent history. From 1990-2020, youth participation levels in mass nonviolent movements have been consistently high. In over 80% of all nonviolent mass movements, youth comprised at least 25% of frontline participants. Fully half of such campaigns featured frontline participation in which at least half the observed participants were youth. This means that young people have participated at disproportionately high rates in maximalist nonviolent campaigns, despite wielding less formal political power at the ballot box, in elected office, and in positions of economic, social, and political power and influence. Notably, there are no significant time trends in the extent of young people's frontline participation or movement leadership during the past 30 years, measured by campaign start and end years—young people have participated at consistent levels throughout this period.¹³

WHAT DETERMINES YOUTH PARTICIPATION?

Existing work describes factors that drive young people to participate in protests, such as high youth unemployment and abnormally large youth populations (known as a "youth bulge").¹⁴ Interestingly, this report's analysis finds no significant structural predictors for increased youth frontline participation aside from population size. Larger countries are somewhat more likely to see higher rates of youth participation, but youth unemployment, poverty, education, and youth bulge (the percent of the population that are children five years before campaign onset) are uncorrelated with youth participation rates. This report also investigated whether egalitarian democracy, consultative political processes, and political polarization influenced levels of youth participation. None of these features of the political climate were significantly associated with the extent of young people on the frontlines of nonviolent mass campaigns.

¹³ Note that the data does not measure campaign-year youth participation, but overall participation observed at the campaign's peak and periodized according to the start and end dates.

¹⁴ Honwana (2013), "Youth, Waithood, and Political Protest in Africa"; Urdal (2006), "A Clash of Generations?"

Instead, the analysis reveals that intra-campaign dynamics are strongly associated with campaigns' demographic characteristics. Clear youth representation in movement leadership, explicit involvement of youth organizations, and movement demands specifically framed around the needs of younger generations are all strongly associated with higher rates of frontline youth participation. These are correlations, not necessarily causal relationships, so it is difficult to say with confidence whether youth participation causes or is caused by these other factors (likely, they are mutually reinforcing). Nevertheless, movements that explicitly engage youth are more likely to exhibit high youth participation.

Notably, the null findings on structural factors could stem from missing data on education and unemployment variables which constrains the effective sample size in regression analyses—unfortunately, age-disaggregated data on these and other indicators is often unavailable. Maximalist campaigns may also be driven less by material issues like youth unemployment, and more by more general rights-based concerns. However, this report's assessment is that the causes of youth participation are less important than their effects. Substantial youth participation in nonviolent campaigns is nearly ubiquitous, yet the field knows little about how this might affect movement outcomes. It is to this latter question that this report is addressed.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND MOVEMENT SUCCESS

The central finding of this report is that the extent of youth frontline participation significantly predicts campaign success: where young people participate in large numbers, campaigns are more likely to succeed ($p < 0.05$). Quite simply, most campaigns with extensive frontline participation by youth¹⁵ were successful, while most campaigns with none, low, and even moderate numbers of youth participants failed (see Table 1). Intra-campaign variables such as youth leadership, youth issues, and the presence of youth organizations may be compounding, but they did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Table 1: Association between Youth Frontline Participation and Campaign Outcomes

	Extent of Frontline Youth Participation				
	None	Limited	Moderate	Extensive	Total
Failure	3 (50%)	18 (60%)	43 (68%)	44 (44%)	108 (54%)
Success	3 (50%)	12 (40%)	20 (32%)	56 (56%)	91 (46%)
Total	6	30	63	100	199

Chi2(3) = 9.655, Pr = 0.022. Percentages are the fraction of total failures/successes within each level of youth participation.

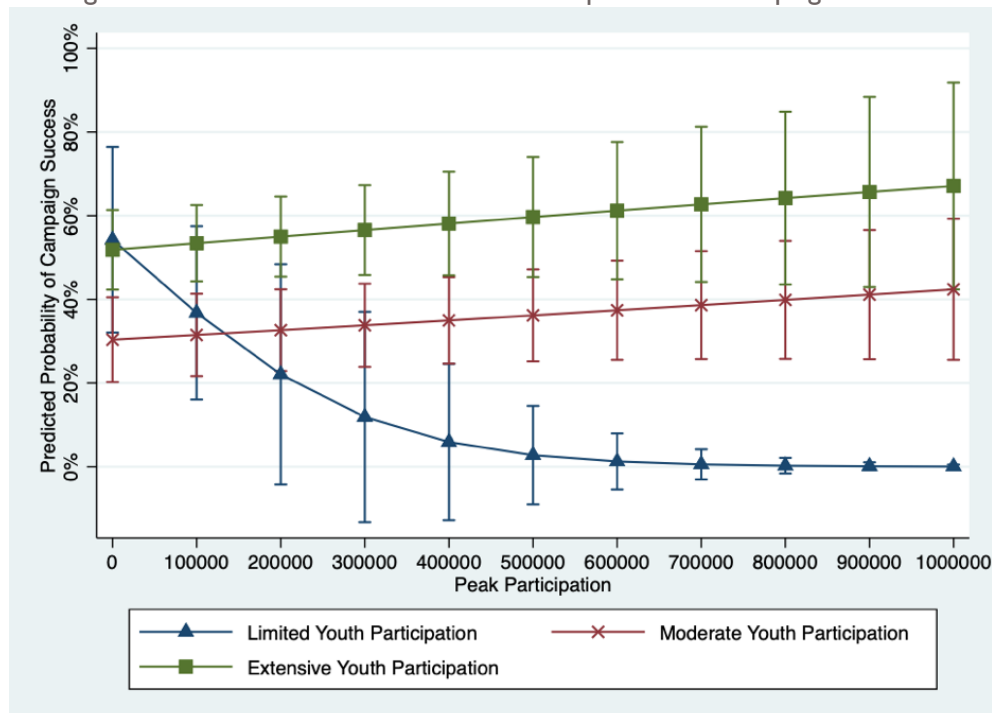
Prior research demonstrates that several campaign and country factors also shape the likelihood of success. Therefore, this report specifies a multivariate logistic regression model examining the

¹⁵ Movements are coded as having extensive youth participation when youth comprised the majority (at least 50%) of observed participants. See the appendix for complete coding details.

association between the extent of youth frontline participation and campaign success, alongside several control variables. These include campaign size (one of the strongest predictors of success), the country's logged population size (associated with both campaign onset and size), the country's youth population percentage (accounting for possible "youth bulge" effects), and campaign end year (nonviolent campaigns have become less successful¹⁶ in recent years).¹⁷ Standard errors are clustered by country to account for cross-sectional autocorrelation.

Youth participation has an independent positive association with campaign success even when controlling for these factors. Figure 2 depicts the marginal effects.¹⁸ At average levels of peak participation (roughly 280,000 people), campaigns with extensive youth frontline participation are more than twice as likely to succeed as campaigns with limited youth participation. These differences only widen with size; as peak participation increases, campaigns with at least 25% of frontline youth participation steadily grow more likely to succeed, while campaigns with limited youth participation become less likely to succeed.¹⁹

Figure 2. Association between Youth Participation and Campaign Success



Why is greater youth participation associated with greater chances of campaign success? This report cannot determine a causal relationship, but there are several intuitive explanations. One explanation

¹⁶ Chenoweth (2020), "The Future of Nonviolent Resistance." We control for campaign end year in all models to account for this declining success rate.

¹⁷ We use this set of core control variables in the primary model, but we also conduct sensitivity analysis to introduce two additional controls: the country's pre-campaign level of egalitarian democracy and whether security forces defected (both predictors of success). We find that both covariates are positively correlated with success, and that the association between youth participation and campaign success remains statistically significant ($p < .05$) in this model.

¹⁸ Figure 2 omits cases with no observed frontline youth participation, since these are very rare ($n=6$) and so produce unreliable marginal effects estimates. It is also right-censored at 1,000,000, as there is only one outlier campaign larger than this that also featured limited youth participation.

¹⁹ Large protests with limited youth participation are rare events, so marginal effect estimates at especially high levels of peak participation have less real-world support. That said, the key diagnostic from Figure 2 is the downward slope of the limited participation line across levels of peak participation, not the specific point estimates for high participation levels.

might be that youth participation simply increases overall participation, magnifying the campaign's numerical advantage. The regression analysis controls for campaign size, accounting for this possible effect. And surprisingly, further analysis reveals that campaign size is unaffected by youth participation rates—youth-heavy campaigns are not significantly smaller or larger than campaigns with moderate or fewer youth on the frontlines.

An alternative set of explanations comes from recent case study analysis at USIP on women and youth participation in nonviolent campaigns.²⁰ That research finds that youth can be especially committed and creative activists, and that they are less bound to rigid cultural hierarchies that might obstruct diverse coalition building. As Pinckney and Rivers (2021) write, “Movements where [youth] participate or lead tend to last longer, show greater creativity and diversity in their tactics, better maintain nonviolent discipline, and better overcome political or identity-based polarization.” These behavior-based theories are not directly testable with the WiRe+ data, but they are plausible explanations for the observed relationship.

Indeed, these intuitions are reinforced by observations of archetypally successful nonviolent campaigns in the WiRe+ dataset, many of which feature extensive youth participation. For instance, Sudan's 2019 Revolution was driven by a generation of young Sudanese who explicitly rejected the Bashir regime's efforts to divide and rule Sudanese society along ethnic, religious, and regional lines.²¹ Similarly, Ukraine's 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests were initially sparked by determined student activists that occupied the Maidan—these activists were committed to nonviolent discipline despite violent repression, and the Euromaidan community they fostered became a vibrant engine of protest activity and a creative space for cultural expression.²² Similar patterns of committed and intersectional youth engagement can be found in Lebanon (2019), Algeria (2019), Armenia (2018), and others.

Of course, other maximalist campaigns featuring extensive youth participation were violently suppressed or otherwise failed to achieve their goals. Youth participation is not a panacea. Nevertheless, the WiRe+ data illustrates that movements with strong youth cohorts have been likelier to succeed than those that fail to inspire young people to join the cause.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND REPRESSION

Disturbingly, another important finding from the WiRe+ data is that campaigns with higher rates of youth participation experience more intense repression. This report measures repression using the Political Terror Scale (PTS), the highest value of which capture widespread state-sponsored violence against civilians, including murders and disappearances.²³ The linear regression model includes controls for youth population percentage (accounting for youth bulge effects), the existence of a

²⁰ Pinckney and Rivers (2021), “Precarity and Power.”

²¹ When the Bashir regime tried to blame unrest on Darfuri agitators, protesters responded by adopting the protest chant of “We are all Darfur!” Similarly, Sudanese Christians stood guard to protect Muslim worshippers while they prayed at protest events. See Stephen Zunes. 2019. “Sudan's 2019 Revolution: The Power of Civil Resistance.” *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, Special Report Vol. 5*; Marovic, Marija and Zahra Hayder. 2022. “Sowing the Seeds of Nonviolent Action in Sudan.” *United States Institute of Peace, Special Report No. 509*.

²² See Shveda, Yuriy and Joung Ho Park. 2016. “Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity: The Dynamics of Euromaidan.” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 7(1): 85-91.

²³ This study uses US State Department data in the PTS score database due to data availability; Human Rights Watch and Amnesty reports have higher rates of missingness.

violent flank (protester violence is strongly associated with repression²⁴), infant mortality rates relative to the global median (a measure of poverty associated with human rights violations), the change in the country's level of democracy in the preceding five years (associated with a decline in repression due to the "domestic democratic peace"²⁵), and country population size (a predictor of repression).

The analysis reveals that youth participation is associated with higher scores on the Political Terror Scale during the final campaign year. This finding holds even when controlling for the degree and scope of repression prior to the campaign start date.²⁶ In short, nonviolent movements in countries with younger populations, and with high rates of youth at the frontlines, tend to elicit harsher government crackdowns.

Why are youth-full movements associated with repression? Existing research has found that youth bulges provoke increased repression as regimes, fearing possible protest mobilization from younger generations, pre-emptively suppress dissent.²⁷ But the statistical association between youth participation and repression persists even when the analysis controls for youth population percentage. Another possibility, albeit one that the WiRe+ data cannot examine, is that widespread youth political disengagement means that governments can violently abuse them with less risk of political or electoral blowback (many autocracies hold at least quasi-competitive elections).²⁸

But perhaps the most pervasive intuition about this relationship is the widespread stereotype of youth movements as undisciplined and especially prone to violence. In this telling, repression increases because youth provoke it by vandalizing property, attacking police, or employing other violent tactics. In line with other work on this subject, the presence of a violent flank is strongly correlated with increased state-sponsored violence, irrespective of youth participation.²⁹ However, the analysis reveals that campaigns with higher rates of frontline youth participation are not more likely than other campaigns to adopt a violent flank. In other words, governments are more likely to retaliate when protesters employ violence, but they are also more likely to retaliate where campaigns are youthful, even when they are nonviolent.

In short, this report finds little evidence that youth are especially violence prone. If anything, governments are more prone to pre-emptively repress youth movements.

LONG TERM IMPACTS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

In addition to these short-term effects, youth frontline participation is associated with several positive long-term changes. Most importantly, youth participation may improve democratic

²⁴ Chenoweth, Erica, Evan Perkoski, and Sooyeon Kang. 2017. "State Repression and Nonviolent Resistance." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61(9): 1950-1969.

²⁵ Christian D. Davenport. 2007. *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

²⁶ We find that the country's recent PTS score is highly predictive of its current score—a finding that is consistent with recent literature on the durability of repressive spells. See Davenport, Christian and Benjamin J. Appel. 2022. "Stopping State Repression: An Examination of Spells." *Journal of Peace Research* 59(5): 633-647.

²⁷ See Nordås, Ragnhild, and Christian Davenport. 2013. "Fight the Youth: Youth bulges and State Repression." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(4): 926-940.

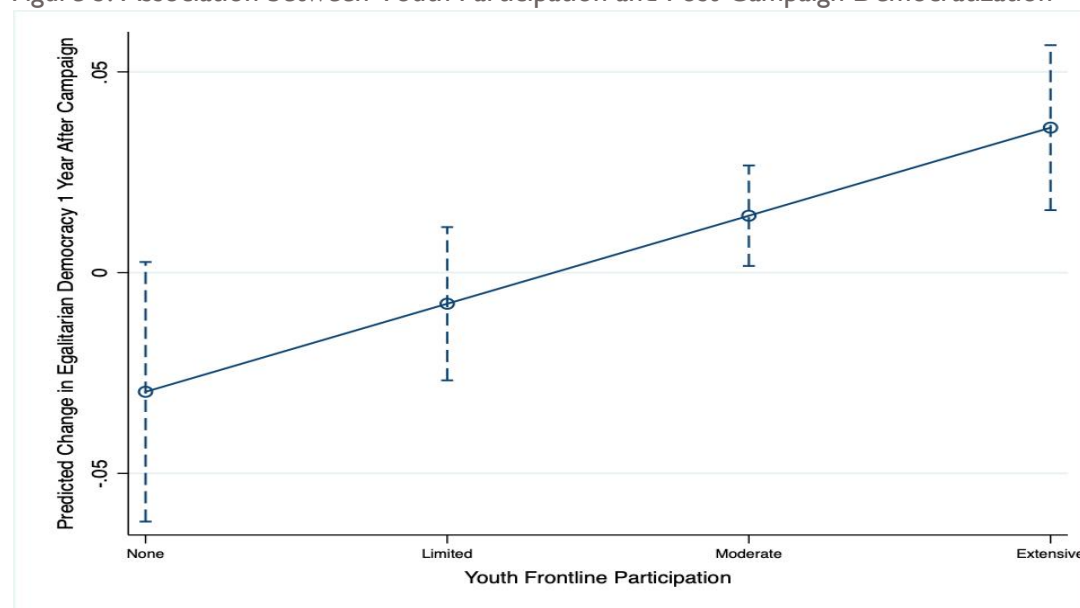
²⁸ For instance, see Wike, Richard and Alexandra Castillo. Oct. 17, 2018. "Many Around the World Are Disengaged from Politics." *PEW Research Center*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/10/17/international-political-engagement/>.

²⁹ Chenoweth, Erica and Kurt Schock. 2015. "Do Contemporaneous Armed Challenges Affect the Outcome of Mass Nonviolent Campaigns?" *Mobilization* 2(4): 427-451.

outcomes. The corresponding linear regression analysis identifies changes in the level of egalitarian democracy, as measured by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) data set, one year after the campaign ends. The model includes controls for the presence of a violent flank (violence decreases the likelihood of democratization³⁰), the country's infant mortality rate relative to the global median (a measure of poverty, which is associated with authoritarianism), logged population size (also correlated with authoritarianism), and campaign end year.

The analysis reveals that both the extent of youth frontline participation and the involvement of youth organizations in campaigns have significant positive associations with two democracy measures at the country level. After a youthful campaign's final year, egalitarian democracy (capturing equality between social groups) and liberal democracy (capturing individual and minority rights and civil liberties) are both significantly greater in both the short term (one year) and long term (five year). Remarkably, this democratizing association with youth participation is obtained regardless of whether the campaign succeeds ($p < .01$ - See Figure 3). These associations are also substantively meaningful. In 2021, the average egalitarian democracy scores for Africa and Asia were 0.27 and 0.26, respectively – for these cases, extensive youth participation (with a predicted change of roughly 0.03 in Figure 3) would constitute more than a 10% increase in a single year.

Figure 3. Association between Youth Participation and Post-Campaign Democratization



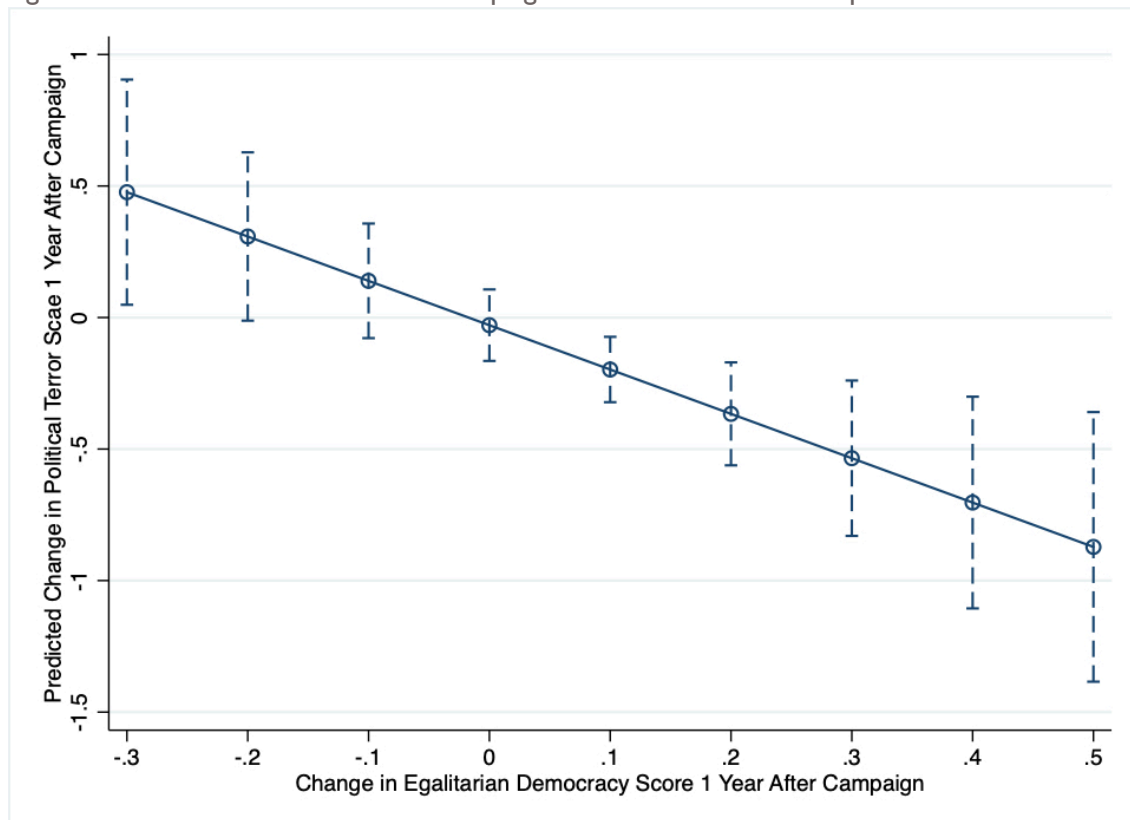
Y-axis denotes change in predicted value of egalitarian democracy 1 year after campaign end—positive values show improvements in democracy. Youth frontline participation is significant at $p < .01$ (shown with 95% confidence intervals).

In the same vein, governance becomes more consultative following youth-full social movements. Controlling for the standard set of controls described above (country infant mortality rates, population size, and campaign end year), greater youth frontline participation is positively associated with improvements to consultative policymaking in government one year after the campaign ends, regardless of whether the campaign succeeds or fails. Moreover, the presence of youth organizations has both short and long-term positive associations with changes in consultative policymaking. Although again only correlational, these results suggest that more highly organized youth participation can lead to more durable consultative practices in governance than frontline participation alone.

³⁰ Pinckney (2020), *From Dissent to Democracy*.

Another important result involves long-term state violence. The WiRe+ data shows that movement-driven gains in democracy are associated with a reduction in state violence (PTS scale) after campaigns end, regardless of whether those campaigns achieve maximalist objectives (Figure 4). This finding is consistent with recent work demonstrating that the only way to fully end “spells” of multi-year government repression is to democratize the country.³¹ The analysis suggests that extensive youth participation may indirectly help to reduce long-term state violence by enhancing broader processes of liberalization and democratization, though youth participation would need to be coupled with other enabling factors to achieve some of the larger changes in egalitarian democracy scores depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Association between Post-Campaign Democratization and Repression



At the same time, however, the analysis also uncovers a moderate increase in violent, state-sponsored backlash against youth organizations when campaigns are defeated in the short term. Controlling for the same set of covariates discussed above (presence of violent flanks during the campaign, country infant mortality rates, population size, the degree of democratization after the campaign ends, and campaign end year), we find that the presence of youth organizations in movements corresponds to a slight but significant increase in repression (PTS scale) one year after a failed campaign. Hence, there may be increased risks of expanded repression in countries in which incumbent regimes defeat campaigns with large-scale youth participation and stubbornly resist democratization.

Beyond these significant political gains, a final set of findings speaks to links between youth participation and countrywide improvements in quality of life. Country-level indicators of material wellbeing are often slow-moving and difficult to change even via major political transformations.

³¹ Davenport and Appel (2022), “Stopping State Repression.”

Nevertheless, we find modest evidence that youth participation in nonviolent campaigns leaves countries materially better off in the long run. Specifically, the presence of youth organizations and the inclusion of youth issues in successful nonviolent movements are both correlated with decreases in infant mortality rates five years after campaigns end. This is important, because infant mortality is considered one of the most robust indicators of overall population-benefiting development.

However, these results on infant mortality rates starkly contrast with those for other youth-specific indicators of material wellbeing. Most prominently, youth unemployment rates do not appear to improve at the country level as a result of youth frontline participation in movements. In fact, the data appears to reveal a significant relationship between the presence of youth organizations and *increased* youth unemployment five years after successful campaigns have ended. The cause of this relationship is difficult to precisely identify. It may reflect labor market backlash against politically active youth. Another possibility is that transition periods generate economic hardships that are not easily remedied.

Other relevant indicators of youth material wellbeing (such as schooling access or youth-specific poverty) are unfortunately either unavailable or contain significant missing observations. Regardless, this report finds little evidence that youth participation provides direct material benefits to younger generations beyond broad improvements to democracy and potential positive reverberations on infant mortality rates.

LGBTQ+ AND NONVIOLENT ACTION

While youth participation in nonviolent campaigns was remarkably consistent over time, observable LGBTQ+ frontline participation became far more frequent over this report's period of study (Figure 5). Overt LGBTQ+ participation in nonviolent action was exceedingly rare until 2006, and 50% of campaigns with frontline LGBTQ+ participation in the WiRe+ dataset occurred in the final four years of study (2015-2019).

Figure 5. Frontline LGBTQ+ Participation in Maximalist Campaigns by Start Year (n=206)

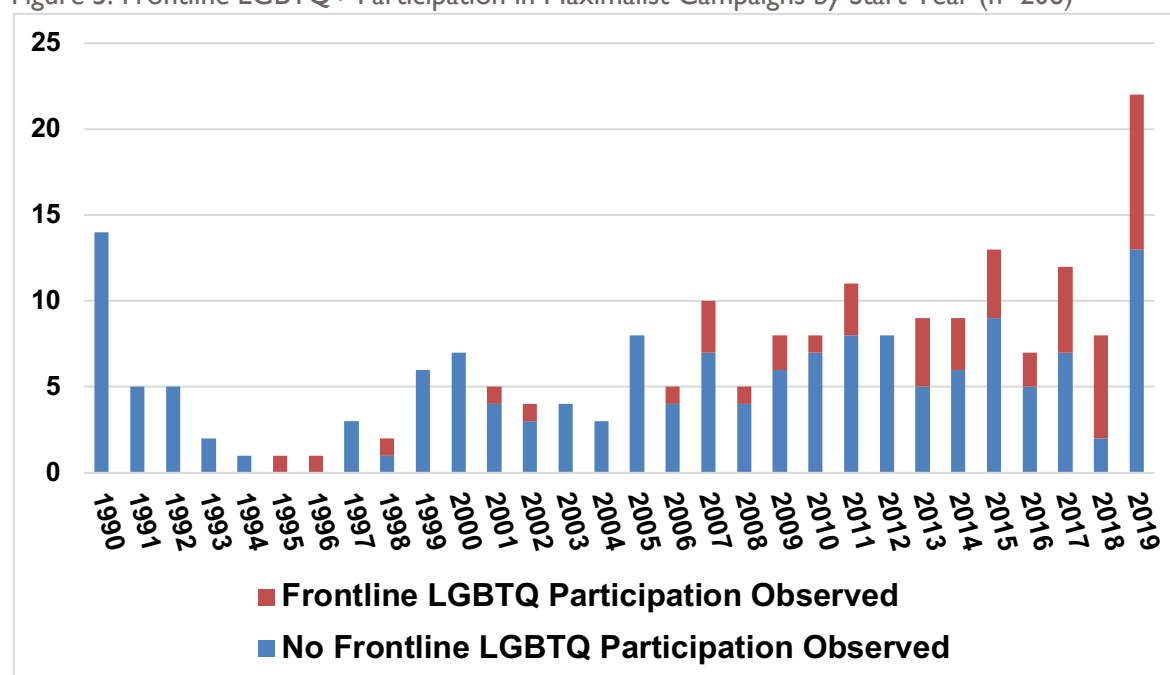


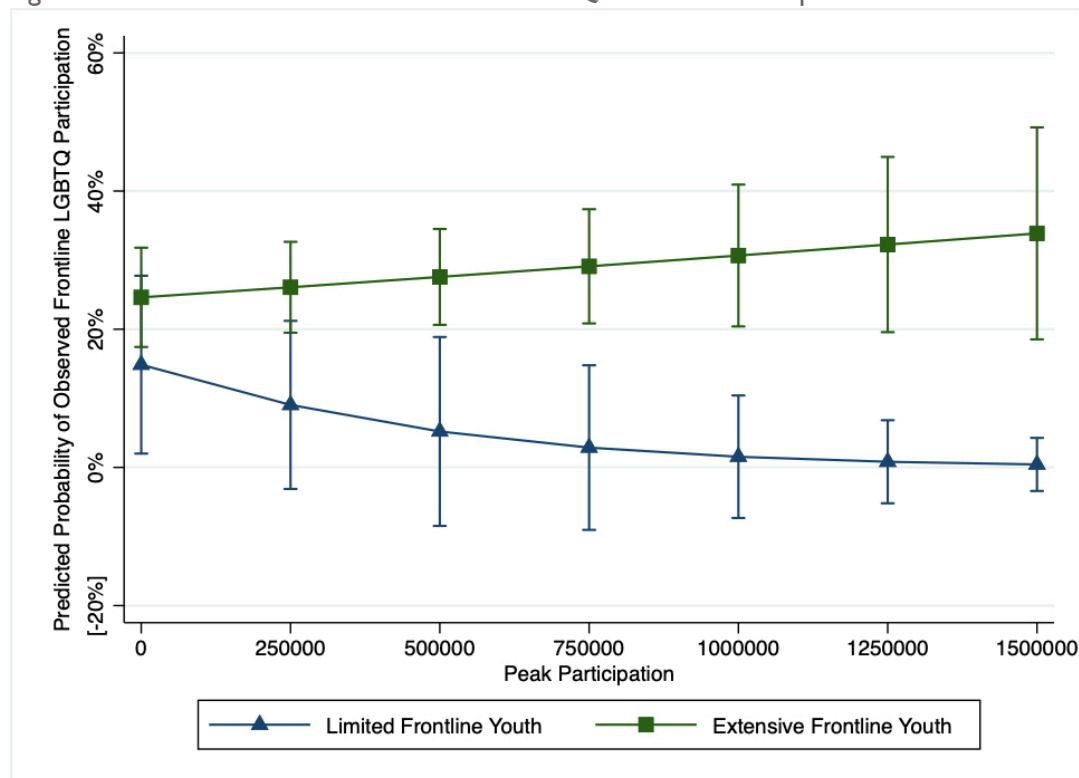
Figure 6: Maximalist Campaigns with LGBTQ Frontline Participation (n=49)



Additionally, LGBTQ+ participation is associated with various movement-level campaign attributes. In particular, LGBTQ+ participation is positively and significantly correlated with increased youth participation—the greater the extent of frontline youth participation, the higher the likelihood of also observing LGBTQ+ participants at the frontlines ($p < 0.1$).³³ Similarly, the presence of youth organizations is also strongly associated with LGBTQ+ organizational participation ($p < 0.01$).

³³ The logistic regression modelled in Figure 7 controls for the level of egalitarian democracy in the country, the degree of LGBTQ+ representation and legal protection in the country, campaign size, logged population size, logged youth

Figure 7. Association between Youth and LGBTQ Frontline Participation



These relationships are intuitive. Younger generations are generally more tolerant of LGBTQ+ identities than older generations, so movements that prominently feature youth may feel more welcoming to LGBTQ+ participants than older or less diverse campaigns. By the same token, a greater percentage of people in younger generations openly identify as LGBTQ+ relative to older generations, so drawing more youth into protests should naturally increase the number of LGBTQ+ participants (though young LGBTQ+ activists may not necessarily participate explicitly in terms of that identity). Regardless of the reason, youth and LGBTQ+ activism seems to go hand in hand.

IMPACTS OF LGBTQ+ PARTICIPATION

This report considers whether LGBTQ+ frontline participation is associated with key outcome variables for nonviolent campaigns, especially campaign success. In a bivariate regression model, the association between LGBTQ+ frontline participation and campaign success is significant among campaigns that begin after 1995 (no campaigns before 1995 featured overt LGBTQ+ participation). However, the association between LGBTQ+ frontline participation and campaign success is not robust to multivariate model specifications. In particular, the coefficient loses significance once the model accounts for the extent of youth frontline participation and overall campaign participation, two factors that strongly predict campaign success.

This null finding may be driven to some degree by the smaller sample of observed LGBTQ+ participation as an independent variable. Overt LGBTQ+ participation in nonviolent action is a relatively new phenomenon, and there are a limited number of observations from which to measure

population, infant mortality rate relative to the global median, and the campaign onset year. In this model, because we are interested in attributes of the campaign while it is ongoing, these indicators are taken from the campaign onset year (rather than campaign end year, as used in the study's other models).

variation. The past decade's uptick in LGBTQ+ participation also coincides with an increased frequency of nonviolent campaign failure, a phenomenon that remains poorly understood.³⁴ The WiRe+ dataset and this report's analysis of LGBTQ+ participation is therefore exploratory—future data collection efforts could expand the temporal scope, increase the number of observations, and obtain more precise correlational estimates.

Beyond campaign success, we might expect that the visible participation of LGBTQ+ organizations in a campaign would help to reinforce social tolerance of such groups, resulting in progressive policy changes or legal protections for LGBTQ+ people. Instead, the analysis finds that LGBTQ+ frontline participation did not have an observable association with either short or long-term improvements to the status of LGBTQ+ people in society.³⁵ This suggests that LGBTQ+ participation in maximalist campaigns does not automatically translate into greater acceptance or legal protection for LGBTQ+ people. However, gains in post-campaign democratization is associated with an increase in status and protection of LGBTQ+ people in society after campaigns, regardless of movement outcomes. As a result, further analysis might focus on the possibility that youth participation – which as discussed above is positively associated with democratization – may have an indirect positive effect on LGBTQ+ rights and influence.

Last, an important cautionary note is that there may also be moderately increased risk of backlash against LGBTQ+ rights and political power in countries where LGBTQ+ organizations have been involved in campaigns that failed. Specifically, the presence of LGBTQ+ organizations in movements is significantly correlated with lower scores in political power for LGBTQ+ people relative to heterosexuals in the year after campaigns end unsuccessfully. Given their history of cultural marginalization and political exclusion (often enforced by violent repression), LGBTQ+ people may be especially easy targets for retribution from oppressive regimes in the aftermath of unsuccessful efforts at democratization.

POLICY AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This report documents several positive trends regarding youth and LGBTQ+ frontline participation in nonviolent campaigns. Youthful campaigns are more likely to succeed and are associated with greater improvements to democracy and poverty reduction in the years after a nonviolent campaign, even if that campaign fails. Youth participation is also strongly associated with LGBTQ+ participation.

Other results are more concerning. Youth movements are no more prone to violent flank formation than movements lacking extensive youth frontline participation, but they face more violent repression, especially in cases where campaigns fail to achieve regime change. Moreover, movements with youth and LGBTQ+ frontline participation do not appear to produce direct material gains for those groups beyond broad improvements to democracy, even if those movements succeed.

³⁴ Chenoweth (2020), "The Future of Nonviolent Resistance."

³⁵ From the V-Dem codebook, the indicator on power distribution by sexual orientation is described as follows: "contrasts (A) the political power of heterosexuals and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) members of the polity who are not open about their sexuality with (B) the political power of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) members of the polity who are open about their sexuality." This is an ordinal measure, with 0 meaning that LGBTQ+ people "are entirely excluded from the public sphere and thus deprived of any real political power (even though they may possess formal powers such as the ballot)" to "LGBTs enjoy somewhat more political power than heterosexuals by virtue of greater wealth, education, and high level of organization and mobilization." (V-DEM Codebook, <https://www.v-dem.net/documents/1/codebookv12.pdf>, pp. 208-209).

Several policy recommendations arise from these findings. First, youth participation in nonviolent action is a force for good that should be embraced when possible. Some amount of youth participation is near ubiquitous, but the more involved youth are, the more likely is success and the more democratic the country will become, even if the movement fails to achieve its maximalist goals. In addition, the prevailing stereotype that youth lack discipline and are predisposed to violence lacks empirical support, at least in this dataset.

Unfortunately, mobilizing younger generations can prove challenging, as they are often alienated and disillusioned by gerontocratic political systems that do not represent them. Failing to overcome this generational political apathy threatens to leave global reformist movements bereft of the youthful vigor, creativity, and determination that has energized many successful nonviolent campaigns, and that will likely be necessary to roll back the ongoing and worrying trend of global democratic backsliding. For this reason, ongoing efforts at USAID and the State Department³⁶ to promote youth political engagement and empowerment are laudable, and similar efforts should be prioritized.

In doing this work, program emphasis should be placed not just on youth and LGBTQ+ participation, but on organizing and capacity building. The underlying systemic and structural barriers to progress for youth and LGBTQ+ people are not easily rectified, and broad improvements to democracy, while clearly desirable, do not necessarily empower these groups. The WiRe+ dataset illustrates that simply including youth and LGBTQ+ people in movements is insufficient to improve their material wellbeing. That finding is broadly consistent with other recent research that finds that women and youth participation in social movement rarely translates into durable political gains for these groups.³⁷

What is required, then, is an approach that helps youth and LGBTQ+ people mobilize not just for short-term protest participation, but for long-term political advocacy and engagement. This includes setting reasonable expectations for the immediate gains of nonviolent action campaigns, capacity building in organizational and leadership skills, and deliberate preparation for periods of transitional mobilization.³⁸ The latter should also include strategizing around concrete objectives to improve LGBTQ+ and youth material wellbeing during periods of democratizing reform. Indeed, better integrating historically marginalized LGBTQ+ and youth cohorts into civic organizing processes will almost certainly produce positive spillover effects for nonviolent campaigns, which thrive on diverse cross-cutting coalitions, as well as for society as a whole, by cultivating baseline standards of equity and tools of citizen empowerment that apply far beyond youth and LGBTQ+ specific issues.

Beyond policy recommendations, much remains to be learned about youth and LGBTQ+ participation in nonviolent action. This report identifies intriguing associations between youth participation, campaign success, democratization, and poverty reduction in the aftermath of nonviolent campaigns. However, it can only speculate as to why these correlations obtain, due to the limited nature of the data available. Future research should pursue more fine-grained studies of the mechanisms at play, including analysis of events data or campaign-year data which can help to untangle the sequence of events leading to these outcomes.

Two findings in particular deserve greater attention. First, the WiRe+ data reveals that campaigns with high levels of youth participation are no more likely to adopt violent flanks than campaigns with minimal youth participation. This finding cuts against common misconceptions of youth as more risk-acceptant and impulsive, and therefore more prone to violence. Future studies should confront this question head on by exploring the links between youth, risk acceptance, and participation in

³⁶ For instance, the Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation at USAID's recent work to strengthen youth organization and leadership, or the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor's nascent project on youth engagement in Bangladesh and Nepal.

³⁷ Pinckney and Rivers (2021), "Precarity and Power."

³⁸ On sustained mobilization during transitional periods, see Jonathan Pinckney (2020), *From Dissent to Democracy*.

nonviolent action. Youthful risk acceptance may embolden young protesters to engage in violent confrontations, but a willingness to act despite serious threat of harm is also essential to disciplined peaceful protest against repressive autocracies. Disentangling these competing effects could provide important insights for conflict prevention and mitigation.

Second, the link between youth participation and democratic gains should be explored more thoroughly. If youth participation is associated with long-term democratic expansion, then youth empowerment will lift all boats. Indeed, other studies suggest that broad trends in post-campaign democratization are the most impactful factors in predicting clear long-term improvements to LGBTQ rights in a country, as well as declines in state repression more generally.³⁹ As a result, youth participation in nonviolent campaigns may be a crucial factor in expanding access to democracy, physical integrity rights, and group rights—albeit indirectly. Understanding the mechanisms that link youth participation to democratic improvements is therefore a priority for future research.

³⁹ Javier Corrales. 2017. “Understanding the Uneven Spread of LGBT+ Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1999-2013.” *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 7(1): 52-82; Omar G. Encarnación, 2014. “Gay Rights: Why Democracy Matters.” *Journal of Democracy* 25(3): 90-105; Christian D. Davenport and Benjamin Appel. 2022. *The Death and Life of State Repression*. New York: Oxford University Press.

ANNEX: WIRE+ DATASET CODEBOOK

Indicators for Youth and LGBTQ+ Dimensions
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Variable Name	Variable	Definition	Additional Rule(s) / Clarification
yfrontline	Youth in Frontline Roles (0=no; 1=yes)?	Youth (under 30) and/or students reported / observed on frontlines of peak demonstrations, protests, or nonviolent events (1) or not (0)	To qualify as a 1, there must be reports of youth actively involved in frontline confrontation against opponent personnel.
qfrontline	LGBTQ+ in Frontline Roles (0=no; 1=yes)?	LGBTQ+ people reported / observed on frontlines of peak demonstrations, protests, or nonviolent events (1) or not (0)	To qualify as a 1, there must be reports of LGBTQ+ people actively involved in frontline confrontation against opponent personnel.
yextentfrontline	Extent Youth in Frontline Roles (0=none; 1=limited; 2=moderate; 3=extensive; -99 ambiguous/unknown)	Extent of youth frontline participation. None (0) indicates no observed frontline role for youth. Limited participation (1) indicates a handful of observed frontline youth participants (i.e. youth are less than 25% of frontline participants). Moderate participation (2) means that youth are clearly and routinely involved in the frontline of the campaign, and that the proportion of youth campaigners is significant (between 25 and 50% of frontline participants). Extensive participation (3) means that youth frontline campaigners comprised the majority (at least 50%) of observed participants. Ambiguous (-99) indicates that after extensive searching, the extent of frontline	A code of 0 for this variable must match a code of 0 for the "Youth in Frontline Roles" variable.

		participation by youth is ambiguous or difficult to nail down.	
yleadership	Youth Reported in Active Central Leadership (0=no; 1=yes)	Youth reported / observed in movement leadership (1) or not (0)	To qualify as a 1, there must be explicit mention of youth functioning as campaign leaders, either as a single leader or in the context of a primary, central leadership group. This does not include a youth wing or some other formal organization that is excluded from the primary movement leadership; this is coded as 0.
yextentleadership	Extent of Youth Reported in Leadership (0=none; 1=youth among formal leadership; 2=youth primary campaign leaders; -99=ambiguous /unknown)	Extent of youth in campaign leadership. None (0) indicates no observed youth in campaign's upper echelons. Youth among formal leadership (1) indicates that one or more youth are among the campaign's leaders, but not the primary leader or figurehead. Youth primary campaign leaders (2) indicates that the overall primary campaign leader is one or more youth. If this is ambiguous or unknown after extensive searching, code this variable as -99.	A code of 0 for this variable must match a code of 0 for the "Youth Reported in Leadership" variable.

qladership	LGBTQ+ People Reported in Active Central Leadership (0=no; 1=yes)	LGBTQ+ people reported / observed in movement leadership (1) or not (0)	To qualify as a 1, there must be explicit mention of LGBTQ+ people functioning as campaign leaders, either as a single leader or in the context of a primary, central leadership group. This does not include some other formal organization that is excluded from the primary movement leadership; this is coded as 0.
yorgs	Formal Youth Groups Involved in Campaign (0=no; 1=yes)?	Formal youth or student groups/associations/movements are involved in the movement/campaign (1) or not (0)	"Formal youth groups" means youth or student organizations with formal titles.
qorgs	Formal LGBTQ+ Groups Involved in Campaign (0=no; 1=yes)?	Formal LGBTQ+ groups/associations/movements are involved in the movement/campaign (1) or not (0)	"Formal LBTGQ+ groups" means organizations with formal titles.
yissues	Youth Issues Central to Campaign Demands (0=no; 1=yes)?	Youth/student issues featured among top 5 demands made by the movement/campaign (1) or not (0)	Code for the entire campaign, not just for youth participants of the campaign.

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